

Jan Helped People Hold Jobs

R&R was a Pioneer In Community Employment

Reynolds & Reynolds is a company with a plant in Celina where it manufactures business forms and related products, especially for the automotive industry.

But something else has been made there over the years. Reynolds & Reynolds was one of the first local employers to offer a place at its Celina plant for people with developmental disabilities. Which means that Reynolds & Reynolds also manufactures opportunities.

For decades, Reynolds & Reynolds has welcomed workers with many different levels of abilities. That has required imagination, planning, encouragement, discipline and attention to detail. From the beginning, all that and more was supplied by Jan Tindall, a longtime Reynolds & Reynolds management employee who oversaw the plant's initiative to work with people with developmental disabilities.

For her unswerving support to those associates, Jan was presented with Mercer DD's Albert Heckler Award. The annual award recognizes individuals who provide exemplary service to people with disabilities in Mercer County.

"So many of our individuals went through the doors of Reynolds & Reynolds to go to work there," said Mercer DD Superin-

endent Shawn Thieman in presenting the award. "Jan, you taught them how to follow the rules and meet expectations at a workplace. With Reynolds & Reynolds, we first dipped our toe into community employment, and you led the way."

The relationship between what was then Cheryl Ann and its CA Group and Reynolds & Reynolds developed because Jan had the vision and the drive to help make it happen. "Around 1990, I was put in a new role, overseeing safety and the facility at our Celina plant, and that included working with people from CA Group," she said, not just the individuals but the job coaches who helped them enter and succeed in the working world.

"When we first got the opportunity (to partner with CA Group), we knew that it was the right thing for our community, to include individuals with disabilities in our workplace," Jan said. "And it just grew from there. Whenever there was a new job in the plant, we always thought, 'Would this be a good job for somebody from CA Group?'"

Jan had never worked with people with developmental disabilities before they came to work at Reynolds & Reynolds. The initiative grew so quickly that "we had a CA Group job coach there all the time," she said. "Jim Jenkins, Dave



Above, Jan Tindall receives the Albert Heckler award from Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman. Below, Jan and her family.

Knous, Linda Thomas, Kevin Pyle —I learned so much from them."

Jan soon found that she had the heart for it, Thieman said. "It can't always have been easy for her. Prior to Reynolds & Reynolds, it didn't always happen that our people were accepted in the workplace. Jan made it feel like it was *their* workplace, that they were (Continued on page two)

We Hope to See You Out and About in 2021

I can't believe we are quickly approaching March of 2021—that will mark a full year ago that we began dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. It has probably been the most difficult year in many of our lives. Daily schedules were turned upside down, vacations were postponed, large events were cancelled, and even small events with family did not happen in many cases. Our patience and grace were certainly tested.

The offering of a vaccine has me feeling optimistic, and I hope that we can use 2021 as a year to get things back to normal. We are seeing group sizes increase within day programs, students are attending school settings much more regularly without interruptions, and we are putting together a plan that will allow our Early Intervention services to be offered directly, in person.

The Mercer County Health Department deserves a lot of credit for the way that it has handled this pandemic. Its cooperation with us through the vaccine offering has been greatly appreciated. Our individuals living in group settings (and their caregivers) were offered the vaccine in group 1a, and our individuals with significant health concerns were a part of 1b. The Health Department set up a clinic within our building for group 1a and assisted us in getting to the front of the line for those in 1b.



**Mercer DD
Superintendent
Shawn Thieman**

We are working hard to make sure that everyone has accurate and educational information available to make the best decisions for themselves and their loved ones.

Vaccinations are a personal choice and we understand that there is some hesitation to receiving them; however, we also know that a large percentage of us will need to receive the vaccine if we intend to get our lives back to normal. I look forward to seeing many of you at local

festivals, sporting events, and many other places that we have avoided in the past year.

Thanks for all that you have endured in 2020 and let's create a much different path for ourselves in 2021.

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a part of it and many eventually became Reynolds & Reynolds employees. Some were able to retire from there. And while they were working, they had days off, birthday celebrations, just like everybody else.

"And they were expected to meet the bar that Jan set for them. Reynolds & Reynolds didn't lower the bar for our individuals—there were the same expectations for them as for anyone else who worked there. Jan had a lot to do with creating that atmosphere."

She also brought compassion and commitment to the relationship, he added. "She took things to a whole new level. The relationships that she had with those individuals—they knew that they could call her at home if they had a problem getting to work, for instance, and she would figure out how to get them there even if she had to go pick them up herself. If they'd see her out in the community, they would run up to her like she was their best friend."

Jan also became an advocate for community employment with other area businesses and organizations. "Many times, local industries would call and ask to come see how we did it," Jan said. "We invited them in, and talked it over with them. Eventually, other employers started hiring people with

disabilities after they saw what we were doing.

"We also got calls from schools every year asking if they could bring in a group of high school students with developmental disabilities so we could talk with them about learning life skills, trying to get them ready to enter the workforce. We'd sit down with them and talk about what makes a good employee: coming in every day, having a positive attitude, doing a good job. It was always a lot of fun."

Jan retired from Reynolds & Reynolds on December 22, after 46 years with the company. She said she is going to miss the everyday contact with her coworkers. "When you work with people for so many years, it's like family," she said. "The best part about Reynolds & Reynolds is the people. We've got great people who work there—everybody is so friendly and cooperative. We live in a great community."

The award was a nice exclamation point to her career, she said. "Never in a million years would I have expected to receive that award. It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and I am very appreciative," she said. "My family was as excited about it as I was. They've always been so supportive of me, and told me they were proud of me."

Ed Keefer Honored as DSP of the Year

You can try to praise Ed Keefer for what he did for Charlie, but the way Ed sees it, he had no choice. “Everybody else cut away from Charlie, because of the virus,” Ed said. “I couldn’t leave him alone.”

What Ed, Charlie’s direct Service Provider (DSP), did was stay with Charlie when both tested positive for the coronavirus in May. Charlie needed help to get through the day. Ed was committed to providing that help. So Ed stayed with Charlie day and night in his apartment in Celina, until Ed couldn’t stay anymore—with worsening COVID-19 symptoms, he had to get to the hospital.

Ed, who is 74, remembers the day he dragged himself out to the car to drive himself to the hospital. Charlie walked with him. “I could only take about two steps at a time and then I had to stop and rest,” Ed said. “Charlie walked me out to the car to make sure I made it.”

As they said goodbye, Ed was aware he might not see Charlie again. “I was really bad. I was one of the lucky ones,” he said.

Lucky because he lived. Ed spent four weeks in the hospital, away from his family, his wife, Lil, and Charlie. He still has lingering health issues from the virus.

What he doesn’t have is any regrets. Ed, who first went to work at Charlie’s DSP in November 2019, said he spent years in management in various manufacturing plants. He has worked and lived in many places around the country. And this is what he believes: “The day I was born, I was put on a path. No matter where that path leads me, that’s where I am supposed to be. And I think my path ended up here for a reason. I’m serious about that.”

Working as a DSP with Charlie is Ed’s way of paying back

all the goodness he’s seen during his life. “I worked hard all my life. I put in a lot of days, a lot of hours, busy, busy, busy all the time,” he said. “But I’d never done anything like this before. I thought this would be a way to give back to the community.”

Working as a supervisor taught him people skills, also needed for a DSP. And it helped that he and Charlie clicked. They have some of the same interests and enjoy being around each other. They both like to go to auctions; Ed is an avid glass and crystal collector, and Charlie jokes that Ed buys them all up.

Jessica Heck-Stelzer is the SSA assigned to Charlie. She has watched the relationship grow. “They are like brothers,” she said. When Ed was in the hospital, Jessica made sure that Charlie had his meds and other supplies, and installed a video camera at his front door “so that we knew who was coming and going.”

One silver lining in the situation is that when Charlie was without Ed, he realized he could do more for himself than he once thought. “Through all this, he has gained some independence,” Jessica said.

When he is with a DSP, it is likely to be Ed, who returned to work in August. “I schedule myself for as many hours with him as it takes,” Ed said. “I’ll do whatever needs to be done.”

For his selfless service to Charlie, Ed received the Mercer Board of DD’s first-ever DSP of the Year Award. Ed’s family was with



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— Ed Keefer with his family and Charlie

him when Mercer DD Superintendent Shawn Thieman presented the award during a ceremony on November 30.

Ed also received a commendation from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. “I hereby commend you, Ed Keefer, for your sacrifices and for caring for Charlie through his illness, putting your own life at risk,” wrote Ohio DD Director Jeff Davis. “I also thank you for all you do every day, being an empathetic person who truly cares for others. It truly takes a special person to do the work you do, especially at this time and I am so appreciative of you.”

Ed is a little gruff about all this fuss. “Don’t make me out to be a saint,” he said. He’s just a man who knows he’s on the right path.

To view award videos for Ed Keefer and Jan Tindall, search for Mercer DD on YouTube.

WREATHS FANTASTIQUE



Mercer DD staffers outdid themselves in a wreath contest in December organized by the SSA Department. Each staffer was invited to decorate a wreath. Mercer DD's Sparks cheerleading team members then judged the wreaths.

Congrats to Molly Dillon, Chloe Steirgerwalt and Kathy Coon, the winning wreath designers.

Wreaths were then distributed to bring cheer to individuals served by Mercer DD, especially those who are feeling isolated by COVID-19 restrictions.

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